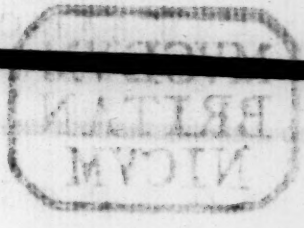
Dr. *BRAY's*

SERMON

Preached before the HONOURABLE

HOUSE of COMMONS.



Martis, 1 *Die Februarii*, 1763.

ORDERED, That the Thanks of this House be given to the Reverend Doctor *Bray*, for the Sermon by him preached Yesterday before this House at *St. Margaret's*, *Westminster*; and that he be desired to print the same; and that Mr. *Jenkinson* and Sir *Roger Newdigate* do acquaint him therewith.

T. WHITE,
Cl. Dom. Com.

MVSEVM
BRITAN
NICVM

694. f. 4.
19

A

SERMON

Preached before the HONOURABLE

HOUSE of COMMONS,

AT

St. Margaret's, Weſtminſter:

On *Monday*, *January* 31, 1763;

Being appointed to be obſerved as the Day of the Martyrdom of King CHARLES I.

By THOMAS BRAY, D.D.
Fellow of *Exeter* College in *Oxford*.

LONDON:

Printed for J. FLETCHER, in the Turle, at Oxford; and ſold by JAMES FLETCHER and Co. in St. Paul's Church-yard, London.

MDCCLXIII.

A

SERMON

Preached before the HOUSE of COMMONS,

at

St. Margaret's, Westminster:

On Monday, January 31, 1734,

Being appointed to be observed as the Day of
the Martyrdom of King CHARLES I.

BRITISH MUSEUM

By THOMAS SHARP, D.D.

Fellow of [illegible] College in Oxford.

LONDON:

Printed for J. PEMBERTON, in the Poultry; and
Sold by JAMES FLETCHER and Co. in St. Paul's Church-
yard, London.

MDCCXXXIV.

1 St. Peter ii. 16.

As free, and not uſing your liberty for a cloak of maliciouſneſs, but as the ſervants of God.

THE providence of God, to draw forth the powers of human nature into action, and to regulate the counſels and deſigns of men by juſt principles, hath not only made individuals, but public ſocieties, for the moſt part, the authors of their own happineſs and miſery; and hath annexed, in the ordinary courſe of things, ſimilar events to like cauſes. Hence, by looking back on what has paſt in former ages, we may learn what effects are likely to follow, in the uſual order of things, and ſo regulate our own actions as to derive on ourſelves every bleſſing, and avoid every curſe, which God has laid in the conſtitution of nature, for the puniſhment of evil doers, and the reward of thoſe that do well. Happy would it be for mankind, if ſeaſonable reflections

tions on the miſcarriages of times paſt could inſtruct them in that wiſdom, which might come too late from their own experience.

To promote this ſalutary end, the wiſdom of the legiſlature hath preſerved from oblivion the deplorable event of this day, by an anniverſary ſolemnity adapted to the mournful occaſion: the moſt becoming celebration of which conſiſts, not in awakening the ſpirit of diſcord by reproachful invectives againſt the dead, but in laying ſuch obſervations before the living, as may guard them againſt the rocks and quickſands which proved deſtructive to their anceſtors.

The fatal cauſe of the unparalleled violence which we are now aſſembled to lament, and expreſs our deteſtation of, was unqueſtionably the abuſe of liberty; which was carried to an unjuſtifiable length, and actually uſed as *a cloak of maliciouſneſs*, while the intemperate zeal of weak minds for liberty was made a weapon, in the hands of crafty hypocrites, to deſtroy the very being of liberty itſelf.

St. *Peter*, in his time, had ſeen the pernicious effects of extending a zeal for liberty, beyond its reaſonable and juſt bounds. When the Goſpel was making a ſucceſsful progreſs in the world, it ſuſtained no inconſiderable

diſadvantage from a ſeditious principle of the *Jews*, that, being God's freemen, they were exempted from the juriſdiction of heathen magiſtrates. Leſt this national prejudice ſhould ſpread its contagion, or even the imputation of it draw upon Chriſtianity the reſentment of the civil powers; the Apoſtle, in writing to the *Jews* of the diſperſion, who had embraced the Goſpel, acknowleges their claim to liberty, but cautions them, in words of the greateſt energy, againſt diſobedience to government, for which the plea of liberty could be nothing more than a mere hypocritical pretence. For, notwithſtanding their freedom as Chriſtians, they were ſtill the ſervants of God; and, by that awful relation, were obliged to a faithful and conſcientious obedience to the civil government, which his providence had placed over them: they ſhould live therefore *as free, and not uſing their liberty for a cloak of maliciouſneſs, but as the ſervants of God.*

From hence it will not be foreign to the purpoſe of the day,

I. Firſt, to offer ſome conſiderations on the nature of civil liberty, and the danger of abuſing it.

II. Se-

II. Secondly, to apply the rule preſcribed by the Apoſtle, to uſe our liberty *as the ſervants of God.*

I. Firſt, civil liberty conſiders men as citizens and ſubjects of government; and in this reſpect may be defined to be the freedom of human actions, ſo far as they are unreſtrained by poſitive laws. Whatever the legiſlative power ordains, for the benefit of ſociety, is a juſt reſtraint and boundary of civil liberty. Where there is no legal reſtriction, the liberty of the ſubject remains the ſame as in the ſtate of nature, but claims the protection of government. The enjoyment of our natural rights, unleſs limited by the laws of ſociety, is an eſſential part of conſtitutional freedom.

It follows, from the nature of government, that private convenience muſt often yield to public utility. Though the legiſlature can have no juſt power to command any thing immoral; yet ſome abridgment of natural right muſt be ſubmitted to, for the ſake of the common good. But in a well conſtituted government, ſuperior advantages more than compenſate the diminution of natural rights: as when every man's natural claim of doing him-

ſelf juſtice, in perſon, is ſuperſeded by a public tribunal; and when the national defence is maintained, by a legal exertion of the collective wealth and ſtrength of the members of a community.

But then the advantages of civil liberty can ſubſiſt on no other foundation, than the conſtitution of a free government. Unleſs there is a ſyſtem of laws adequate to the occaſions of a nation, and guarded with ſufficient authority, and juſtice is duly adminiſtered, the enjoyment of the rights and privileges of a rational and juſt liberty can have no exiſtence. For if, on the one hand, a deſpotick prince was to trample on the diſtinctions of right and wrong; or, on the other, if there was *no king in Iſrael*, but popular violence was to prevail, and every man to do that which was *right in his own eyes*, the conſequence is plain, true liberty would be exterminated by the dominion of luſt and paſſion.

Civil liberty then does not conſiſt in an abſolute independence and exemption from rule and government, but in a right to act freely within the preſcription of the law. The law is the baſis and foundation of civil liberty. It operates in contrary directions, and has a threatening, as well as a favourable aſpect,

being a ſource of reſtraint on evil, while it is a fountain of freedom to do well. And the authority of government, which enforces the law, is the protection of liberty. Where the law therefore ſpeaks uniformly with the ſame voice to all the members of the community, and the conſtitution of government has ſuch vigour and integrity as to cauſe juſtice to be ſteadily and impartially adminiſtered, there civil liberty ſubſiſts in its higheſt perfection.

It is an error of very dangerous conſequence to imagine, that we can never have liberty enough; and to fancy that every diminution of the authority of government is gaining ſo much freſh acceſſion to the privileges and independence of the ſubject. What is it men would be independent of? Is it not of lawleſs dominion and arbitrary power? This end cannot poſſibly be obtained, unleſs there is a ſufficient authority in government to execute the laws: for *if ſentence againſt an evil work be not executed ſpeedily, the heart of the ſons of men will be fully ſet in them to do evil.* What then will become of the innocent and peaceable, if rapine and injuſtice are ſecure of impunity? Yet on this rock, viſible as it is to cool reflection, has been ſhipwrecked almoſt every ancient nation, the extinction of whoſe

liberty

liberty is recorded in hiſtory; and on this our own excellent conſtitution was loſt for a time, which ought to be a perpetual warning, leſt the next conteſt for an exceſs of liberty ſhould end in irretrievable ruin.

The extent of liberty, which ſubjects can claim the enjoyment of, muſt be eſtimated by the ſyſtem of laws under which they live. The eſtabliſhed conſtitution is the determinate meaſure of obedience to ſubjects, and fixes the boundaries of their liberty. 'Tis not ſufficient for men of parts and learning to demonſtrate what is fitteſt and beſt. Such political wiſdom might be exquiſitely adapted to the formation of the original plan of government. But to the generality of thoſe who are poſſeſſed of it, liberty is matter of fact, not the ſubject of deliberative right, and problematical expediency. As long as the powers of a free government act upon conſtitutional principles, and deſtroy not the form of policy from whence their inſtitution and authority are derived; ſo long obedience is an indiſpenſable duty.

It is further evident, that there are not only various forms of free government in the world, but likewiſe that every form of government differs widely from itſelf in the

ſeveral periods of its duration. Hence unequal degrees of liberty are found to exiſt, in different ſtates, and in the ſame ſtate, at different times. But if ſettlements are duly eſtabliſhed by the legiſlature, it would be unlawful for ambitious enterprize to undermine the foundations of government under pretence of ſuperior perfection. And ſhould deſigning reformers, under the reſpectable character of patrons of liberty, inflame the minds of the people with groundleſs jealouſies, or aggravate real grievances, admitting no ſatisfaction for paſt errors, but inſidiouſly adding fuel to the flame, ſacrificing public good to private ambition; ſuch perſons would ſtand chargeable with all the miſchief occaſioned by their reſtleſs and factious diſpoſition.

At the ſame time it muſt be acknowledged, that where freedom is the inheritance and birthright of ſubjects, the defence of it againſt any invader is juſtifiable. And ſhould preſcriptive rights and conſtitutional privileges be undermined by ſubtilty, or on ſome of thoſe extraordinary conjunctures which nations are ſubject to, be wreſted by power from the immediate poſſeſſors; a recovery, when practicable, is not only innocent but meritorious.

If

If the principles laid down are juſt and reaſonable, they may give us ſome imperfect guidance with reſpect to our own conduct; but they will at leaſt furniſh us with a rule to diſtinguiſh the oppoſition to the crown in the reign of the unhappy monarch *Charles* the firſt, when it was juſtifiable, from that reſiſtance which was unjuſt, impious, and deteſtable.

It is undeniable that the troubles were firſt occaſioned by encroachments of the prerogative, and illegal invaſions on the liberties of the people; when indeed the rights of the ſubject were not aſcertained with ſo much preciſion, as they are at preſent. The grievances moſt complained of were the oppreſſive meaſures of the Star-Chamber and High Commiſſion Court in arbitrary fines and impriſonments. The frequent diſſolutions of parliaments, to evade a conſtitutional redreſs of grievances. Illegal taxations, and eſpecially the enormous exaction of ſhip money; which the oracles and guardians of the law, not then ſo happily independent as in the preſent reign, were compelled by menaces to declare legal, contrary to their honour and conſcience. The ſeverities of the courts of prerogative, being occaſionally exerted againſt

individuals only, rather gave offence, than provocation to the public. But when property in general was invaded under a mere fictitious pretence of law, and the invaſion defended by a reaſon that left no man any thing he could call his own; the evil was ſeen to come home to every perſon's own door, and conſequently the alarm was as extenſive as the oppreſſion. By ſuch indefenſible acts of power, the nation was reduced to the unhappy alternative of attempting to recover the ancient conſtitution by ſuch means as could effect a reformation; or elſe of abandoning the cauſe of liberty, and embracing ſlavery without conteſt or contradiction.

Candour and humanity will apologize for the king; who, as a private man, was exemplary for a ſincere attachment to religion and virtue. But he had been unfortunately educated in notions of an unlimited monarchy, which notions were too much countenanced by temporizing expoſitions of law and goſpel. 'Tis ſufficient to ſay, that the king's misfortunes were chiefly owing to other men's faults, and to his reigning at a ſingular criſis of peculiar danger; when prerogative, which had been growing through ſome preceding reigns, was now advanced to the utmoſt length it

could go, without a total change of the conſtitution, and was arrived at the edge of a precipice; and when the people had diſcovered their right and ſtrength to reſtrain abuſes, which were grown ripe for reformation.

But let us now change the ſcene, and view the ſtate of the nation, when every grievance was redreſſed, every conceſſion made that could reaſonably be aſked; nay, when more was yielded than could juſtly be demanded or expected; the unrelenting animoſity and inexorable oppoſition to the crown then perſiſted in, not to limit and reform, but to extirpate monarchy, could fall under no denomination but that of ſedition, treaſon, and rebellion.

Had the advocates of liberty acquieſced in a reaſonable ſecurity for the conſtitution, when that important point was obtained, they would have been entitled to the moſt illuſtrious monuments of praiſe, which a grateful people could beſtow on the greateſt benefactors. A *Roman* conſtancy had been exerted in the cauſe of liberty: there was only wanting a love for their country, truly *Roman*, to ſacrifice private diſcontents when the public was provided for.

But

But fatal was it for the nation, that the ſpirit of diſcord was now gone forth. No confidence was any longer placed in the crown. No aſſurance of a reconciliation could extinguiſh men's ſuſpicions. Apprehenſions of revenge, when a parliamentary protection ſhould ceaſe, ſucceeded to the reſentment of paſt indignities. Bad men now gained the aſcendant over the good; and, by inflaming their paſſions, led them to the moſt dangerous extremes. This appeared in a moſt reproachful remonſtrance againſt the government, when every grievance was redreſſed; which inſult was therefore unpardonable. By this pernicious inſtrument the real boundary of peace was paſſed, and the trumpet to rebellion was in a manner ſounded.

The calamities, which the war was productive of, were too many to be here enumerated. In a few years the land became *a field of blood*. There was ſcarce a houſe, *in which there was not one dead*. It looked, as if Heaven had poured out *the laſt vial of wrath* on a guilty nation. The contention was begun for civil and religious liberty, and both were loſt in the ſharpneſs of the conflict. The fury of the war mingled every thing ſacred and human, and plucked up the loweſt foundations

tions of legal government. The king was dethroned, condemned, and executed; and every thing ancient and conſtitutional was exterminated with him. Both houſes of parliament underwent, in their turns, diſgraceful revolutions; and were degraded from the awful dignity of their legiſlative capacity, into a ſervile ſubjection to a military power, made up of the wildeſt enthuſiaſts; and, after loſing all authority, loſt even their exiſtence. The honours of the nobility, and privileges of the commons, yielded to the violence of the times. The epiſcopal order, not more eſſential to the church than uſeful to Chriſtianity, was entirely aboliſhed. The venerable ſeats of learning, and even learning itſelf, were expoſed to the illiberal inſults of ignorance and fanaticiſm. To complete the nation's wretchedneſs, the champion of oppoſition to the crown, by the ſubtilty of his policy, and fierceneſs of a daring courage, ſeized the ſpoils of oppreſſed majeſty; and the cauſe of liberty expired under the uſurpation of a ſingle tyrant.

Thus a criminal zeal for unconſtitutional liberty had now compleated its work. The only protection of a legal freedom was broken down, and power without controul took place.

By which event men were convinced, when it was too late, that the licentiouſneſs of ſubjects is no leſs fatal to liberty, than the arbitrary dominion of the moſt deſpotic monarch: that liberty, extended beyond its juſt bounds, leads to abſolute tyranny: and that liberty can only be ſupported by the authority of a free government, conducted by equity and moderation.

Since therefore a gracious Providence hath given us ſuch memorable admonition to profit by the bad example of a former age; let us now conſider by what means we may moſt effectually exculpate the preſent generation from the national ſtain of this day's guilt, and obtain a bleſſing on ourſelves and poſterity. To this purpoſe the Apoſtle, in the text, hath given us an excellent rule:

II. To uſe our liberty *as the ſervants of God*. In which precept we are not directed to undervalue our liberty, or to ceaſe to maintain and defend it. Nothing can imply a greater degeneracy, than to ſink into an unconcern for the moſt effectual means of national happineſs, and for the ſupport of the moſt diſtinguiſhing character of a brave and underſtanding people. If we are faithful ſervants of God, we ſhall acknowlege the bounty

of

of Providence in a thankful enjoyment of our happy and admired conſtitution; and be inſtrumental, as far as we are able, in communicating the divine goodneſs to others. To waſte our Maſter's talents in a profligate diſſipation, is the part of unprofitable ſervants.

Such admonition might be comprehended under the precept in general, *to uſe our liberty as the ſervants of God.* But the Apoſtle ſeems to preſcribe a more particular determination of our liberty, to a regular and due obedience to civil government. The negative precept in the text, forbids the uſe of liberty as *a cloak of maliciouſneſs*, or rather (from the manner in which the original word is circumſtanced by the context) as a cloak of diſobedience to government. The contrary direction is given in the poſitive precept, to uſe our liberty *as the ſervants of God*, that is, in obedience to government.

Hence it is manifeſtly the doctrine of the Apoſtle, that obedience to government is the ſervice of God, in a ſenſe ſo peculiar and appropriated, that men are not the ſervants of God, if they oppoſe and diſturb the eſtabliſhed government.

The Goſpel has made no innovation in the civil rights of mankind; but is intent upon

upholding every legal form of government by adding the weight of religion to prudential reaſons, that the fear of God might co-operate with prudential laws, in the production of tranquillity and peace.

The authority of the Supreme Lawgiver, who is infinite in wiſdom and irreſiſtible in power, is an awful reſtraint on ſubjects of ſerious and religious principles. For the approbation of God is preferable to all worldly concerns. And what motive can engage good men to violate their allegiance to their ſovereign, when, by that act of unfaithfulneſs, they break their peace with God? If men ſincerely *fear God*, by neceſſary conſequence they muſt *honour the king*.

Should the civil and religious liberties of a free nation be ſo powerfully invaded, that the danger were to be extreme, and too great for peaceable remedies; then indeed perſons of the moſt unblemiſhed integrity would be juſtified, in the ſight of God and man, in aſſociating their endeavours, not to overturn, but to ſave, and if poſſible, perpetuate the legal conſtitution of their government. There has been a time, when ſuch proviſion for the common ſafety was neceſſary. For which reaſon the wiſdom of the nation, which ſentenced

tenced the treaſon of this day to everlaſting reproach, hath ſolemnized the revolution with an annual thankſgiving.

But bleſſed be God, the liberties of the people ſtand in no danger at preſent from an undue extenſion of the prerogative of the crown. The annals of time have not recorded a firmer patron of liberty than the prince on the throne. How far the ſpirit of licentiouſneſs may diffuſe itſelf among the people is matter of more intereſting concern. If this enquiry was to be decided by the luxury and extravagance of ſome, the avarice and ambition of others, the growing eagerneſs for private emoluments, and the decay of a diſintereſted zeal for the public good, we ſhould not be without apprehenſions of danger to the internal quiet and proſperity of the nation.

Nor are the ſigns of the times leſs unpromiſing, when we obſerve that general unconcern for religion, which has ſpread its contagion over all ranks and conditions of men. Some inſtances there are of that bold impiety, which dares to inſult the Majeſty of Heaven, with the ſame unreſerve as it offends earthly majeſty. But what is national is that lukewarmneſs and affectation of indifference about

ſacred

ſacred things, and the public duty of religion; which too plainly diſcovers a reluctance *to confeſs Chriſt before men.*

Such principles and practices leſſen the authority of government, and enfeeble the beſt conſtitution of policy in the world. Theſe are the *miry clay*; which, mixed with *the iron* in the feet of the image of government, never incorporates, but weakens and threatens diſſolution to the whole fabrick.

Before the evils which endanger the nation grow inſurmountable, it would not be unſeaſonable for every member of the community to lay the matter ſeriouſly to heart, and not only reſolve to abſtain from abuſing his own liberty, but to uſe it conſcientiouſly as a ſervant of God, and to the utmoſt extent of his influence, encourage the ſame good diſpoſition in others; and implore the Almighty, while the ſky blackens through the iniquity of the times, to put his bow in the cloud, and prevent the return of anarchy and confuſion.

The nation hath been inſtructed by the juſt ſeverity of the judgments of God, particularly in the period of time ſuggeſted by this day's humiliation. We have likewiſe experienced exemplary mercies. The hand of the Almighty hath lately been extended to us in

unmerited goodneſs; not only in protection againſt the moſt alarming dangers, but in ſuch an uncommon ſeries of victories, as have ſeldom adorned the moſt favoured people. The ſcene of war, and the immenſe effuſion of chriſtian blood, are at length concluded in a ſafe and honourable peace. May the God of peace fill our hearts with gratitude and thankſgiving; and eſtabliſh the bleſſings beſtowed upon us, in perpetual tranquillity and unity among ourſelves.

F I N I S

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